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# Who Owns Religion?

## Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Cultural Appropriation in Postglobal Buddhism

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### Abstract

### Keywords

For a religion based on asceticism, Buddhism is interestingly rich and the sangha surprisingly prosperous. As a missionary religion and provider and circulator of several kinds of capital, disseminating and accommodating to a diversity of cultures and markets, it has also reached beyond Asia as “global Buddhism,” being a suitable designation for the modern representation of transnational and transcultural religion. While also used in countercultural and antimaterialist contexts, Buddhism in the West has truly entered the market as religion, spirituality, and provider of secular techniques in recent decades. It has been a symbolic asset beyond religious traditions in entertainment, branding, and the media, and as an immigrant (or “heritage”) minority religion it has become a powerful symbol in the positive narratives of religious diversity. One of the main tropes of more contemporary forms of Buddhism in the West has been its capacity to transcend ethnic constraints and cultural borders as a truly global phenomenon, potentially also suited for a liberal market in an open exchange society with generously “open hermeneutics” and an accessible universal grammar. What characterizes both modern and global Buddhism is thus typically a focus on de-ethnification, de-culturalization, and de-territorialization, claiming universality as a central paradigm fit for a modern, global world.<sup>1</sup>

What could be termed the “discovery paradigm,” by which individuals have free access to discover universal truths through meditation and wisdom, has been — especially for Zen, Vipassana and Tibetan Buddhism — a major narrative in the West through which also psychologists and cognitivists can ascribe scientific value to Buddhism as a “religion of experience.”<sup>2</sup> Focusing on *doing* rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the impact of the forces of globalization on Buddhism (Shields and Kalmanson 2014: 6).

<sup>2</sup> For information on the intersections between Buddhism, occultism, and psychotherapy, see Payne 2012. While anti-intellectualism in the West has been a brand mark for Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, it has been a problem to the more faith-oriented Shin Buddhism (Mitchell 2017: 92).

*being*, modern Buddhism in this regard has in principle no identity constraints, being inclusive and accessible to anyone. As Halafoff and Rajkobal concluded in analyzing Buddhism in Australia:

in ultramodernity, the traditional and modern are intertwined ... old divisions between Western and Asian Buddhists, lay people and Sangha (monastic orders), scholars and practitioners are becoming increasingly blurred and outdated, as alliances form across spaces in response to common concerns.

HALAFOFF AND RAJKOBAL 2015: 120

Chenxing Han similarly characterizes the Buddhism of young adult Asian Americans as highly inclusivist, hybrid, fluid, heterogenous, and flexible, often mixing practices and beliefs across Buddhist traditions (Han 2017). This fits the concept of global Buddhism, consisting of the “transnational and transcontinental flow of Buddhist ideas and practices and the global travel of Buddhist teachers and students” (Bauman 2001: 5) with “patterns of self-cultivation, administrative structures, dispositions and worldviews that intersect across geographical boundaries, lineage and ethnicity” (C. Warner 2017: 251). While historically sharing the characteristics of a universalistic postaxial religion and a modernist grand narrative, global Buddhism with its very “transposable messages” and “portable practices” (Csordas 2009) is mainly the product of a late modern development enabled by the potential centripetal forces circulating ideas, practices, and institutions in an open and interacting world, overcoming isolationist particularism.

However, such seemingly de-territorialized and de-culturized versions of a global Buddhism with fuzzy boundaries in the open market have in recent years also been criticized for actually representing particular cultures (e.g., “white Buddhism,” that is, Buddhists with Euro-American background) with benefits for only particular segments. Suggestions of new “turns” characterized as ultramodern, postmodern, or postsecular reveal possible changes in the Buddhist world as well as the relevance of continuously reconsidering the pragmatic use of analytical concepts and their relation to the empirical world.<sup>3</sup>

This article investigates the discourses behind such conflictual complexes, involving questions of authority, authenticity, identity, cultural appropriation, and representation. It is suggested that criticism of global Buddhism should be seen as representations of what could be termed “postglobal Buddhism,” in which intersectionality/identity politics is a frame of reference working as a centrifugal force questioning and going beyond the trajectories of globalization, signaling a new phase in “Western Buddhism.” The relevance for the study of religion is further discussed with reflections on how to respond to postglobal religious identity politics without being consumed by either stark objectivism or subjectivist go-nativism.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these “turns” are discussed in Gleig 2019: 281ff.

## Stealing and Appropriating Buddhism

Stealing Buddhism is a historical trait. Material objects from a wealthy religion have been sacralized and venerated, but have also been symbols of prey to heathens or unscrupulous looters. Buddhist wealth was destroyed or stolen in Tang China and Meiji Japan as manifestations of political winds of change, and in modern times the fierce intolerance of fundamentalist Muslims has caused irreparable damage to Buddhist treasures in the Near East. What has had even more everlasting historical impact is the Western colonialization of the East and the repercussions on the Buddhist world. Sacred objects were stolen and brought back to Western museums (McDaniel 2016), where they co-narrated the story of victorious expansion and an emerging interest in universal comparison of cultures and religions. Capturing and exhibiting religions exposed a double motive of exploitive utilitarianism and symbolic communication, placing Western colonizers at the top of the hierarchy of cultural evolution, mimicked by the later destructive “iconoclasm” of the communist cultural revolutions and Muslim image breaking (Konchok 2002). Today, the historical appropriation of exotic cultures’ material wealth is a challenge to Western museums in a global world with less obvious legitimacy for Western dominance and self-ascribed supremacy (Jenkins 2016).<sup>4</sup>

While material theft is probably easier to assess in discussions of appropriation, the question of cultural appropriation is a field not identical but related to a variety of moral investigations regarding “the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture” (Rogers 2006: 474). Sombreros worn at Mexican theme parties, dressing up in Japanese kimonos for tourist fun, LEGO making toys from Maori culture, or pop musicians using tunes or outfits from other cultures are examples that not only illustrate the potential guilt of stealing symbols for sale in a commercial market, but potentially also show the misrepresentation and stereotyping of immaterial values from minority cultures, taking advantage of the benefits of structural inequality and often gaining authority to define *the others* as they *really are* (or are *supposed to be*).<sup>5</sup> For native peoples especially, cultural appropriation is deeply related to “a history of political powerlessness [of having] identity continually defined and determined by forces committed to its eradication,” being objects and themes for expressive works; “like angels and mermaids, they are imagined, rather than engaged, in dialogue” (Coombe 1997: 88).

Appropriation of religious belief and practice is one such kind of cultural appropriation, often designated as a specifically “profound offence” (Young 2005). While such religious appropriation has been problematized mainly with regard to indigenous cultures and the threat of cultural extinction or forced transformation, in recent years the question of commercial exploitation of symbols, ideas, and

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<sup>4</sup> While colonial theft is obviously a crime in contemporary moral standards, the demands from the historical victims for repatriation are not necessarily free from strategic, geopolitical motivations, and the moral questions regarding this issue are far more complex than popular discourse (and an article like this) can justify.

<sup>5</sup> For information on cultural appropriation, see Ziff and Rao 1997, Brown 2004, Rogers 2006, Jenkins 2016.

practices from Asian religions has been raised.<sup>6</sup> Buddha Bars, Buddhist tattoos, or Buddhist monk costumes are examples of religious appropriation as “matter out of place,” just as deliberate commercialization and blasphemous use of Buddhist images and symbols.<sup>7</sup> Western neoliberal, commercial uses of Eastern spirituality (Carrette and King 2005) make a considerable profit from yoga, holistic medicine, and Buddhist meditation. Yoga in the West has been stripped of its religious origins (Antony 2014), and Asian meditative traditions have been transformed from ego-diminishing practices to ego-enhancing performances (Gold 2011). The “Oriental Monk” has been a convenient Western icon for alternative spiritualities and consumption (Iwamura 2011), just like Western lamas projecting “authentic Buddhism” on to (American) Asians, and New Age shamans colonizing indigenous religions by performing authenticity as missionaries of “universal spirituality.” The billion-dollar mindfulness industry, including “corporate mindfulness,” has pejoratively been termed “McMindfulness,” with scholars (McMahan and Braun 2017) and Buddhists questioning the authenticity of a commodified and watered-down version of a traditional Buddhist meditation practice, being an example of white privilege (Ng and Purser 2015). Also, as noted by Hsu (2017), “to not acknowledge the labor and contributions of Asian American Buddhists in the development of American Buddhism is simply cultural appropriation.” Parts of Western “white Buddhism” (including “dharma shopping”) in this regard could be seen as a kind of prosperity religion with its Protestantized, American entrepreneurial spirit (Gutterman and Murphy 2016: 133), where the rise of a prosperity-oriented neoliberalization theology and the decline of prophetic liberation theology (100) are not unlike the decline of traditional sangha Buddhism and the rise of individualized, “spiritual” or “secular” Buddhism (Borup 2018).

While material and immaterial appropriation is deeply entangled in questions of financial empowerment and economic profits, it is also a field that is more broadly related to matters of ownership, representation, and identity formation.<sup>8</sup> As such, they reflect the sectarian strife of traditional dharma, and yet they are of a typical postmodern and postglobal kind, reaching into overlapping discussions of religious categorization and scholarly situatedness: Who owns (the right to represent which) Buddhism?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Investigating the correlation between gender and New Age, feminist and spiritual seeker Karly Crowley follows intersectionalist arguments in claiming that “one racial logic for white New Age women is that because white women feel they suffer through sexism, they analogize sexism to racism, which implicitly justifies spiritual appropriation” (2011: 11).

<sup>7</sup> Chinese Buddhist temples have been accused of selling their own spirit to gain economic capital from a booming tourist industry (Lewis 2017). The Knowing Buddha Organization is an example of an Asian Buddhist NPO striving to fight blasphemy and commercialization of Buddhist images and symbols ([www.knowingbuddha.org](http://www.knowingbuddha.org)). For information on this initiative and the relation between Buddhism and Blasphemy, see Jerryson 2018: xxx–xxx.

<sup>8</sup> See Wilson 2009 for information on how the Japanese memorial service for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō*) has been appropriated by both sides of the American abortion debate.

<sup>9</sup> Laurence Cox raises this question in relation to Tibetan Buddhism: “Who has the authority to speak about Tibetan Buddhism, and the counter-interests of academics in controlling the subject” (2013: 269).

## Representing Buddhism

Representation is a crucial parameter for understanding religion. Who has, takes, or is ascribed the authority to represent a given religious tradition, and by which claims and criteria? Sectarian strife and rhetorical positioning have been an inherent part of Buddhist history in the dynamic diversification processes, where charismatic monks/lamas/rōshis have been significant authority holders representing “authentic Buddhism.” Being true representatives of the religion has economic advantages. For instance, the right to own property and ritual objects or the privilege of acquiring tax exemptions or state support depends on the authority of representation. The symbolic capital of having access to authenticity is of equal importance, also as part of Western Buddhism. When “1 percent is hijacking mindfulness,” the alleged majority feels misrepresented in a tradition mainly governed by “t” (Eaton 2014). That “the vast majority of information about mindfulness is disseminated by white people, in media venues controlled by white people, for the primary consumption of white people” (Wilson 2014: 64) resonates with the claim that “the adoption of Buddhist practices into executive suites and government offices seems like a textbook case of cultural appropriation” (Zahn 2016). According to some Buddhists, the overrepresentation of white Buddhist teachers in America illustrates what they consider to be white privilege and racial discrimination in the meditation-based convert communities.<sup>11</sup> Richard Payne, for instance, has criticized white Buddhism and its “white-washing” and erasing of Asian Buddhism to promote an allegedly authentic American Buddhism (Payne 2016) for those with a privileged access to “upper-middle way” (Oliver 2014).

The self-understanding of previous generations of white lamas and Buddhist leaders was to see this “westernization” as a necessary stepping stone in the translation and appropriation of an Asian religion, some of them insisting on revealing what the Buddha *really* said.<sup>12</sup> While a colorless and deculturalized Buddhism can be legitimately correlated with certain classical texts, it is mainly a modern phenomenon with particularized forms of discourse and practices dressed in (Euro-American) normality while de-emphasizing the “ethnic” (non-Euro-American) (Pierce 2000). Rather than “neutral” representations from a cultureless religion, the secular Buddhists, the Buddhist Geeks, and practitioners

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<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that there are currently between 350 and 375 certified Western Insight teachers, and only 10 to 11 of them self-identify as teachers of color (Gleig 2019: 167). Goldstein acknowledges that “when we came back from Asia and started teaching, we kind of infused the teachings with our white, educated, middle-class perspectives” (quoted in Gleig 2019: 166).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Stephen Batchelor’s “secular Buddhism” was an intellectual version of Buddhism suitable for a scientific worldview, and Sangharakshita’s Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO, now known as Triratna Buddhist Community) was established as an attempt to practice a Western kind of Buddhism beyond the constraints of the “cultural” elements of its Asian origin. The Danish lama Ole Nydahl has self-consciously presented his Diamond Buddhism as Western and white, suitable for a modern Western culture, the role of which in recent years has taken another direction with increasing criticism of Islam and immigration. The challenges for Western Buddhist teachers have been discussed at periodic meetings since the initial conferences in Dharamsala in 1993 (<https://www.buddhistteachers.org/media/archive1/Western-Buddhist-Teachers-History.pdf>). Undoubtedly, the time after #metoo has transformed the whole rationale and setting for (Western and non-Western) Buddhist teachers in the West.

of Vipassana and Zen claiming not to be Buddhists or to practice Buddhism (since they are unique individuals not restricted by particular traditions or categorizations) in this regard are primarily representatives of a particular modern (white) interpretation of Buddhism. The psychotherapeutic Buddhism in the same way is a rather particular kind of (white) Buddhism, prescribing not only healing, but also (very specific renderings of) dharma (as depicted in for instance Helderman 2019).

In the same manner, many Western Buddhist teachers narrating Buddhism to Asian Buddhists do not represent “objective, authentic Buddhism,” but are entangled in historical and cultural codes as much as any other representatives of Buddhism. It is quite indicative that international meditation centers in Asia are often used by Westerners, representing a particular Western (rather than a truly global) Buddhism (Schedneck 2017). The often underlying premise for contemporary global Buddhism is its openness to individuals, beyond the constraints of cultural “color,” which is also viewed by critics as another filter: “the dominant narrative in the discourse is that we are all unique individuals ... the intersections of race, class and gender are irrelevant” (Ng and Purser 2015).

Orientalism as a scholarly endeavor framed by colonial hegemony laid the basis for later critique and necessary deconstructions and reformulated horizons for the study of Buddhism. Hierarchical epistemologies were questioned, both those favoring classical texts over lived religion and the ethnocentric (and Protestant) templates forming ideals of “authentic Buddhism,” including a “racial ideology of white supremacy inherent in the Orientalist construction of Asian Buddhism” with “scientific racism” based on evolutionary biases (Cheah 2017: 651). The (somewhat contested) scholarly categorization of the “two Buddhisms” (e.g., immigrant/heritage Buddhism and convert Buddhism) in this sense can equally be seen as a racially dependent and ethnocentrically projected dichotomy, legitimating an underlying hierarchy (e.g., between “ethnic” and “converts,” “spiritual” and “cultural,” “awakened” and “nominal”) with no place for boundary-crossing individuals (e.g., descendants of Asian immigrants, Afro-American Buddhists, etc.) (Fields 1998, Quli 2009, Hickey 2010, Cheah 2011, Han 2017, McNicholl 2018). Most models trying to explain the transplantation of Buddhism to the West are, according to Joseph Cheah, caught in an “ethnicity paradigm” giving “primacy to cultural variables by subsuming race under ethnicity” (Cheah 2017: 655). As this dichotomy “has been done almost exclusively by white American intellectuals,” it represents “racism at its deepest level [through] the power to define” (75).

### **Who Owns Buddhism?**

Media representations will typically favor “Western” Buddhism with its popular appeal, although the heritage Buddhists are far superior in numbers and thus more representative of Buddhism as a lived religion (Borup 2016). When *Time* magazine illustrated their feature of *The Mindful Revolution* with a cover of a young, slim, healthy, white (“cisgender”) woman, voices from Buddhist communities criticized what they saw as yet another manifestation of cultural appropriation for a middle- and upper-class white segment, with the assertion that “the rise of corporate mindfulness has rendered Buddhism far whiter

and wealthier than it has ever been” (Zahn 2016). Before changing the editorial policy to include discussions of the challenges of Buddhist diversities (e.g., gender, color, class), popular Buddhist magazines such as *Tricycle*, *Buddhadharma*, and *Lion’s Roar* were largely catering to the “spiritual Buddhism” of this segment. An editorial reflection by one of them claiming that “the spokespeople for Buddhism in America have been, almost exclusively, educated members of the white middle class ... [whereas] Asian American Buddhists ... so far ... have not figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism” (Tworkov 1991: 4) was not only illustrative of the self-identification of what was perceived as “Western Buddhism,” but also caused an uproar among the Buddhists not feeling included in the representations intersecting media, academia, and the “therapeutic” upper-class, psychologized, brain-science legitimated white Buddhism.

Apart from discursive critique, such as the blog *Angryasianbuddhist* asking for more recognition of Asian Americans in representing Buddhism in America,<sup>13</sup> some American Buddhists have responded with actions and attempts to renew traditions. Non-white Buddhist teachers and representatives have been engaged in “de-whitening” Buddhism by raising “new voices in Western Buddhism” (Baldoquin 2004), promoting a black “radical dharma” within the Tibetan Buddhist community, as envisioned by Williams, Owens, and Syedullah (2016), and critiquing “white supremacy and challeng[ing] the articulation of Socially Engaged Buddhism” (Vesely-Flad 2017: 8). Some Black Buddhists, “reworking Orientalist discourses to empower themselves” (McNicholl 2018b: 886) to fight white supremacy, emphasize Buddha’s own “brownness” (rather than the 19th century portrayals of him as an Aryan), asserting that “Buddha was a person of color (sometimes specifically black) who was a social reformer acting against racially divided caste society of ancient India” (McNicholl 2018a: 236).<sup>14</sup> Some groups have established a mixed POC and white “diversity friendship group” and “‘affinity sanghas’ – one for POC and one for LGBTQI practitioners” (Gleig 2019: 148, 146), while others have made meditation retreats just for people of color since “Buddhism in the West has taken on the cultural trappings of the West, including racism” (Cochran 2004). In an open letter urging white Buddhists to acknowledge their white privilege, the group Buddhists for Racial Justice states that “we believe that understanding our privilege as white people can actually support our liberation as women, queer, working class, and/or other marginalized identity/experience.”<sup>15</sup> The Soto Zen Buddhist Association has also outlined ethical standards addressing diversity, sexual conduct, and the use of authority where members are “committed to actively seeking harmony within such differences as race, class, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, and other forms of cultural identity.”<sup>16</sup> The relevance of the topic was signaled in the journal *Buddhadharma*’s summer 2016 issue, with the title on the front cover “Free the Dharma: Race, Power, and White Privilege in American

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.angryasianbuddhist.com>

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Proud Black Buddhist World Association: <http://www.proudblackbuddhist.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://northamericanbuddhistalliance.org/calls-to-buddhists/>. This might, as **one** phrased it, be because “trying to have conversations with white people is pretty painful and exhausting. That’s why white folks need to start doing their own work and not rely on folks of color to educate them” (quoted in Gleig 2019: 151).

<sup>16</sup> <http://szba.org/szba-ethics-statement/>.

Buddhism.” It is probably no coincidence that the front cover of a recent *Lion’s Roar* magazine on Buddhist meditation is a POC.

## Global and Glocal Buddhism

Controversies about authority and representation are by no means new to Buddhism. Sectarian strife and hierarchies of authenticity have been an inherent part of Buddhist history. However, such recent tendencies of critique, purification, and reinventions of traditions are also representative of general “postglobal turns” in (some) contemporary religions also having an impact on how they are studied.

If globalization can be broadly characterized as the increased transnational flow of ideas, practices, products, and services in a mainly capitalist open market, “globalized religion” is one domain in which the expansion of the world frames the ideas and practices of religious worlds, typically represented by increased and circulating diversity, migration, and hybridity. Global Buddhism is one such kind of global religion with its transcultural flows, de-territorialized universality, and centripetal “global religioscape.” Being in continuation of the general modernization processes of Buddhism, Martin Baumann (2001) found “global” (rather than “modern” or “postmodern”) to be more inclusive and related to the spatial perspectives. Scott Mitchell distinguishes between modern and global Buddhism by referring to the first as “the subject, a collection of rhetorical or hermeneutic strategies,” whereas the latter “is the system or means by which these discourses spread across cultures via networks of trade, travel, and telecommunications” (Mitchel 2016: 245). Buddhism in the USA is thus “the result of modernist discourses made possible through the apparatus of globalization” (245). As a concept covering a wide range of complex empirical variations, globalization naturally can be expanded to also include conflicting elements and tendencies, with its relativization and pluralization tendencies triggering responses from religious organizations. Peter Beyer broadly categorizes two main possibilities, namely liberal and conservative: one accepting religious pluralization, and the other seeing it as a negative attack by “the others” on own moral values (1994: 86). Several “religious pluralism” projects have analyzed and celebrated such value shifts from what Hollinger (2013) in the USA describes as a “post-Protestant” development from white Protestant Christianity to multiculturalism and multireligiosity. Akin to the conservative reactions, Roland Robertson sees religious fundamentalism as a *reaction* to (rather than an aspect of) globalization, understanding globalization as the seemingly contradictory processes of “universalization of the particular” and the “particularization of the universal” (Robertson 1992: 178). Thomas Hylland Eriksen regards “re-embedding” as a consequence of the disembedding forces of globalization (including de-localization), with “strong networks of moral commitment, concerns with local power and community integration, national and sub-national identity politics” (2007: 9), proclaiming that “the more similar we become, the more different from each other we try to be” (13). Since processes of change will always trigger various forms of responses, particularization and resistance to de-localizing forces are naturally not new. Also, Buddhist nativist identity in a historical perspective

with its “revisionist and polemical tendencies [has been] concerned to excise the non-native” (Teeuwen and Blezer 2013: 10).

## Postglobal Buddhism

However, there is also a significantly new context framing discourses of a more unique contemporary nature. Globalization has been challenged by criticism from deprived voices not feeling integrated in the realities of neoliberalism or the highbrow discourses of the global establishment. Both sides of the political spectrum have responded with physical or symbolic walls, borders, boundaries, diversifications, and enclavizations in what seems to be contours of a postglobal era,<sup>17</sup> primarily shaped by identity politics at both individual and national level. Such identity political experiences of antiglobalization naturally also affect and are expressed in religious worlds. What could be termed “postglobal religion” is a response to the centripetal forces of globalization and an encouragement to strategic disruption of existing orders, including critique of the widening social and economic gaps.<sup>18</sup> A significant element of postglobal religion is also engagement with identity in key with the articulation of a particularity re-enchantment. Just like postcolonial voices were critical responses to Western hegemony, postglobal discourses and practices at individual, institutional, and national levels are critical and strategic reactions to globalization, favoring the forces of centrifugal dispersion. This can be represented by antiglobal religious re-nationalization, re-ethnification, re-culturalization, re-traditionalization, re-racialization, re-tribalism, re-territorialization, and re-configuration of the codes appropriating religious diversity. It can be seen in discourses and practices favoring monolithic cultural/national narratives, minority suppression, fractionalization, and downscaling of religious freedom. And it has increasingly been articulated in “culture wars” with challenges of cultural appropriation and religionization of political, cultural, ethnic, or gender-related identity/intersectionality politics being turned into sacred authenticity claims. In postglobal religion, the intersections of religious, ethnic, and political identities are combined in an “experience paradigm,” where subjectivity as an authority claim is a “property of groups having own cultures shaped by their own lived experiences” (Fukuyama 2018: 111). “Tribalism by choice” (Gutterman and Murphy 2016: 131) is part of an identity formation for insiders and for sympathizers enacting “affiliative ethnic identity” (Jiménez 2010: 1757), where participation, active enforcement, and (re)invention of cultural essence is part of a postglobal identity paradigm.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Post-globalization” is sometimes used in economic terminology to describe the negative responses to the neoliberal paradigm of globalization. “Post-global” has also been used in literature to describe the subaltern paradigm, and in climate politics to describe the (effects of) globalization.

<sup>18</sup> In a book about Buddhist responses to globalization, Hershock thus describes the “deepening and widening gaps of income, wealth, risk, and opportunity” (2014: 17).

<sup>19</sup> An example of affiliative ethnic identity is Australian author and Buddhist Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo), whose claim of Aboriginal origin was discredited by Aboriginal communities, being a case of cultural appropriation.

While such tendencies are visibly enacted in some Asian Buddhist areas (e.g., the nationalistic Buddhism of Myanmar and Sri Lanka<sup>20</sup>) as part of longstanding conflicts, postglobal Buddhism seems most typically evident in Western (and primarily North American) Buddhism.<sup>21</sup> In her characterization of contemporary (*convert*) Generation X Buddhism in America, Ann Gleig identifies a “collective turn” in the inclusive sanghas, with less focus on modernist individualism and more emphasis on cross-lineage collaboration and sensitivity to Western ethnocentrism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory (2019: 279). A collective (and “communal” [301]) turn could thus be seen as a signifier of a postmodern turn in which the modernist and enlightenment-idealized “white” individualism finds its counterbalance in communal religion, probably being more akin to “original” and traditional Asian Buddhism. The question is, however, if such a communal tendency is not continuously paralleled by and contingent on a new postmodern version of individualism as the ultimate authority of authenticity? Postmodern religion is typically characterized by desecularized re-enchantment beyond the modernist ideals of privatization and a revalorization of a new “groupism.” But it is also (still) characterized by (extreme) individualism from which group-related identity formation develops. “Anti-white-washing” the dharma makes sense both as individual and group projects, framed by the cultural values of both the “communal turn” and the postglobal identity turn. Since “the authentic inner self is intrinsically valuable, and the outer society systematically wrong and unfair in its valuation of the former,” a crisis of identity “leads in the opposite direction from expressive individualism to the search for a common identity that will rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon” (Fukuyama 2018: 10, 56). In the new intersectionality/identity turn, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age etc. are self-consciously used as essential characteristic elements defining identity and group belonging, where genderization, intersectionalization, ethnification, racialization, etc. are legitimate means of power struggles based on “strategic essentialism” (identity essentialization as a strategic means of gaining political goals), or even “strategic antiessentialism” (taking on another identity to express something about oneself).<sup>22</sup>

Gleig finds many examples of contemporary North American (*convert*) Buddhism of the turn to what she characterizes as American trends *after* Buddhist modernism — postmodern, postcolonial, and postsecular Buddhism — and what I propose be identified as postglobal Buddhism: A “shift in focus from

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<sup>20</sup> On “Resisting the Global in Buddhist Nationalism” in Sri Lanka, see Berkwitch 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Post-global Buddhism and the identity “culture wars” are not least visible in American social media, such as Buddhist Facebook groups.

<sup>22</sup> “Strategic essentialism” was coined by G. C. Spivak and “strategic anti-essentialism” by G. Lipsitz. Although widely acknowledging the social constructedness and historical situatedness of the narratives of race and ethnicity (and gender), a strategic essentialism “can be politically expedient and transformative” to recognize the “affective dimensions of race and ethnicity” in British Buddhism (Smith *et al.* 2016: 16). Identity can be negotiated and performed according to the strategic interests of the subjects. While religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and culture are typically criticized as essentialized concepts in a postmodern setting, the same concepts can be used as identity parameters when seen as appropriate. For instance, “culture” is criticized as a factor in discussions of negative attributes (e.g., crime) but celebrated when discussing positive attributes (e.g., food).

the individual to the collective, the internal to the external,” an emphasis “on an embodied and engaged rather than a transcendent approach to Buddhist practice,” and a LGBTQI sangha’s “embrace of diversity and intersectionality” reflecting “the wider cultural shift from the modern to postmodern in which modern liberal goals of assimilation were displaced in favor of a postmodern and postcolonial affirmation of difference” in which “[r]acial diversity and inclusion work replaces a modernist narrative of universalism with a postmodern one of cultural particularity” (Gleig 2019: 5, 154, 173). It could be argued that this is mainly typical for the USA, where the idea of *homo religious* is generally viewed less critically than in Europe, with religious identity formation itself generating social capital and “immigrants [being integrated] more deeply into American civic and political culture” (Foley and Hoge 2007: 214). The USA may be a trendsetter, but awareness is developing in Europe too: “being European or Western becomes synonymous with whiteness,” because “Western convert Buddhism in the UK is itself racialized, gendered, sexed, and/or classed” with cultural hybridization processes that basically “hegemonise and essentialise whiteness and being middle-class — and marginalize racialized minorities and working-class people” (Smith *et al.* 2016: 3, 226, 225). The fight for justice and just representation in the “moral culture” of microaggression and victimhood in American university campuses (Campbell and Manning 2018) is potentially a (post)global phenomenon with impacts also on non-American Buddhism.

What Martin Baumann proposed as “global Buddhism” to designate a fourth period in the internationalization of Buddhism (2001), honoring ideals of inclusive and circular interactionism in a universalist paradigm, seems to be challenged by parallel trends of criticizing and going beyond this. What could be termed *post-global Buddhism* overlaps with “postmodern Buddhism’s” critical skepticism toward grand narratives with its rationalism, universalism, and ideals of progress (Mitchell 2016: 155ff; Gleig 2019: 290). It is also linked to the power-exposition of “postcolonial Buddhism” (Gleig 2019: 292ff) and to the reactions toward streamlined irreligiosity of “postsecular Buddhism” (298ff). The conceptual value of “postglobal Buddhism,” however, is to designate the discursive and strategic reaction toward the centripetal forces of globalization exposing this as highly particularized, pointing instead toward a re-culturalized differentiation of a new (and equally particularized) kind of (mainly North American) Buddhism.

### **From Sangha to Academia: Will the Real Buddhism Please Stand Up?**

The phenomenon of postglobal Buddhism also extends beyond the domain of religion, having a potential impact on the study of religion, not least because deconstruction (including discourses of transcending the boundaries of etic/emic domains) is prevalent in various postmodern theories. Practitioners, scholars, and “scholar-practitioners” ought to be interested in the underlying question: *Who owns the right to represent Buddhism?*

New generations of (Asian American) scholars of Buddhism should be acknowledged for addressing the problematic issues of race, ethnicity, and religion. Exposing the apparent “universality” of Western (or global) Buddhism as being rather particularistic, mainly Euro-American, and just as

“cultural” as the “cultural Buddhism” of the immigrants, is indeed important. Discussing ownership is not only relevant within the sangha, but also in academia, where “real Buddhism” has been a trope constructed and negotiated in various ways throughout history. It is probably right that “Buddhist Studies scholars have been reluctant to account for how race and ethnicity, as social constructs, are fundamental constitutive factors to the identity formation of American Buddhists,” although it does not necessarily follow that “Buddhist Studies scholars have participated in the racialization of particular American Buddhisms, including the construction of ‘whiteness’ and ‘Asianness’” (McNicholl 2018a: 223). Likewise, the editors of the anthology *Buddhism and Whiteness* assert that white supremacy is “operative in Western Buddhism and the academic study of Buddhism in the West” (Yancy and McRae 2019: xvii). A scholar of Buddhism even writes about the “multiple instantiations of Buddhism and white privilege, supremacy, and fragility that co-conspire in the academy to uphold the happiness of the powerful” (Suh 2019: 2).

The skewed representations of true religion and Buddhism as a projection of (Euro-American) Western ideals are examples of “scientific colonization” dressed in a “objectivist study,” being blind to gender, racial, and cultural privilege. “Default value Buddhism” in the West has been primed in the media and in cultural narratives as white, spiritual, scientific, therapeutic Buddhism, everything else being a misnomer causing cognitive dissonance in the eyes of the (white) beholder. What psychologists, in realizing the lack of representativity when conducting experiments, call WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) might as well be an emblem of much representation of Euro-American Buddhism, being particular rather than neutral and universal. Protestantized scholarship and the postcolonial power relations of Buddhism have already been revealed in previous research, and it is also plausible to deconstruct and de-universalize “spiritual Buddhism,” “secular Buddhism,” and even psycho-therapeutic “scientific Buddhism” as Western constructions. For an Asian American, bewildered by categories not corresponding to experiences of lived realities, it is only natural to ask the question: “Will the real Asian American Buddhists please stand up?” (Han 2017).

It is necessary to acknowledge “the global dominance of Western categories and paradigms as hegemony” (Paramasivam and Nair-Venugopal 2012: 167) and the ethnocentrism behind much (Western) philosophy (Van Norden 2017). The presumptuous universality of types, interpretations, and explanations also in the general study of religion can be seen as balancing on the fringe of scholarly colonization with its tradition-making subject appropriation.<sup>23</sup> What Horii calls “critical religion” (referring to a tradition of scholars being dedicated to exposing Western and Protestant readings of religion) as a necessary postcolonialist (and post-Protestant) counterbalance of “category mistakes” (Horii 2018: 37) in which religion is regarded as “useless as an analytical concept” (24) also seems

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<sup>23</sup> Subject appropriation is “when members of one culture ... represent members of other cultures” (Young and Haley 2009: 268).

convincing to counteract the discrepancies between emic and etic discourses.<sup>24</sup> To counteract the somewhat exaggerated mantric slogan “Religion is always about whiteness, since the category of religion is itself fundamentally an expression of whiteness” (Nye 2018), a certain dose of postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion ought to be part of any introductory course on religion to practice critique of all (Western and Christian) concepts and models used. The academic study of religion is indeed, and should be, characterized also by theoretical and methodological diversity.

## Identity as Authenticity and Authority in the Study of Religion

Counterbalancing objectivist models, a subjectivist stance with normative involvement has been the method for some scholars of religion (and Buddhism), where a “participatory turn” with the engagement or identification with the studied groups or practices correlates with research, experience, and potentially also identity politics. Not least in the USA — with large numbers of Buddhist scholar-practitioners at practitioner-friendly institutions,<sup>25</sup> traditions of “Buddhist theology,”<sup>26</sup> identity studies (and politics) at universities, and hermeneutics of faith being exchanged at religious universities and scholarly conferences<sup>27</sup> — it seems more obvious for scholars of Buddhism to see Buddhist scholarship as interreligious dialogue (Cabezón 1998) and insist on alternatives to “exclusively European methods for studying and understanding religion” (Gross 2004: 117).<sup>28</sup>

The convergence between identity politics and scholarly endeavors is, however, also seen in other parts of the world. In India, the Indologist Sheldon Pollock experienced nationalist identity politics when 132 academics in India petitioned to have him removed as a general editor with the argument that

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<sup>24</sup> “Religion” as *shūkyō* did not exist in Japan before the Meiji period, or even before the Second World War, as part of the vocabulary of standard Japanese. The secular/religious boundary is mainly a Protestant invention, and “it is doubtful if these categories [“lived religion,” “religious practice”] make any sense for ordinary Japanese people” (Hori 2018: 9). Thus, because of a (possible) “discrepancy between the academic meaning of ‘religion’ and that in the Japanese colloquial discourse” (27), the analytical concept ought to be banned and instead emic categories should be utilized (45).

<sup>25</sup> Charles Prebish’s survey on North American Buddhologists from 1993 shows that 25 percent were openly Buddhists, and he estimated that “at least another 25 percent remain silent about their Buddhist practice” (Prebish 1999: 189). There is no reason to doubt that the same figures would be realistic today. In a later article, Prebish foresees an increasing interaction between Buddhist scholars and Buddhist communities (Prebish 2006). In her endeavor to investigate contemporary North-American Buddhism, Ann Gleig herself has normative interests in making “better Buddhism” (e.g., “a deeper reconfiguration of power is needed within overwhelmingly white sanghas” [Gleig 2019: 142]). See Aktor 2015, who investigates his hypothesis that more scholars of Buddhism than scholars of Hinduism are religiously engaged, concluding that the main difference is not numerically asymmetrical but rather a matter of openness about it.

<sup>26</sup> “Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection” is a kind of “Buddhist theology” balancing between critical academic analysis and constructive analysis, the latter to “clarify the normative truths, creative potential, and liberating power of Buddhist modes of knowledge and practice as they meet new worldviews and cultures” (Makransky 2008: 141).

<sup>27</sup> Charles Prebish refers to a number of American universities being “practitioner-friendly institutions” (Prebish 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Such arguments might be relevant if one accepts Buddhist scholar Rita Gross’s premise that “the religious studies classroom cannot avoid being a morally charged environment” (Gross 2004: 120), and “good training involves developing empathy for all major religious perspectives” (212), where the people best suited to teach courses on world religions should be “non-Christian scholars-practitioners of one of the world religions” (119).

he was neither Indian nor Hindu and that “only Hindus have the right to write or teach about Hinduism — or for that matter, that only Muslims should teach about Islam, or Jews about Judaism” (Doniger 2016). Wendy Doniger similarly had a book withdrawn by Penguin due to its apparent insults of Hinduism, making her ask “Who owns Hinduism?” (ibid.), rhetorically similar to the Hindu American Foundation slogan “Who owns Yoga?” campaigning to take back yoga from the commercialized market.<sup>29</sup> The experience paradigm (“I experience, therefore I know”) and the identity paradigm (“I am, therefore I know”) coupled with the normative statement about the right to define, characterize, analyze, and represent only “from within” is illustrated in a critique of a book on Hinduism: “A scholar who does not know how to present other cultures by their own criteria should not be allowed to teach those cultures” (in Cabezón and Davaney 2004: 19). After Said’s post-Orientalism, a cathartic neocolonial strategy has appeared as a response in a new hegemonic worldview in which scholars of “the wrong identity” sometimes have to pretend “and hide or deny one’s Western identity to be accepted as a legitimate Indologist and avoid being called an ‘orientalist’” (Kripal 2004: 204). Steven Heine, in a book with the subtitle “Will the Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up?” critiques this stance by questioning the assertion that only insiders or natives “can properly understand and experience Buddhist truth; in other words, the Orient is only for Orientals, and others, try as they might to comprehend, need not apply” (Heine 2008: 4).

### **Circulation, Appropriation and Reinventions of Tradition**

Such postmodern and postglobal insistence on identity authenticity is challenging in scholarly environments for several reasons, not least within the academic study of religion. First of all, what is claimed to be authentic can most often be revealed as highly complex, hybrid, and mixed upon further scrutiny. The history of religions is composed of a long chain of invented traditions, reinventions, and negotiations, just like an “identity” is mainly the product of a strategic and negotiated emblem (as most Buddhist philosophers would agree on). True (postmodern) constructivist questions would naturally be: Whose Zen? Which Buddhism? What claim to identity? Similarly, when writing about “identity museums” where certain groups have “privileged access and authority over the treatment, interpretation, and positioning of collections within museums,” Jenkins questions the underlying politicization of culture: “Who is indigenous? Who decides?” (2016: 253, 264). When leaders of indigenous cultures endorse Christian missionaries’ ideas and appropriate them in a cultural hybridity (with both the invention of tradition and the invention of God [Cox 2014]), they are participating in the same kind of cultural and religious exchange that has characterized Buddhisms in the “looping effects” between East and West with cultural flows emanating from multiple nodes. Nineteenth-century revival Buddhism in

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.hafsite.org/takeyogaback>. See also <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/yoga-certification-board-set-up-by-govt-to-certify-yoga-professionals-1375894-2018-10-26> for information on the Yoga Certification Board set up by the Indian government. On the modern circulation and commercialization of Yoga, including Christian “yogaphobia” and Hindu nationalism, see Jain 2015.

Sri Lanka and Japan was deeply inspired by “the West,” just like the Western “myths of Tibet” have been appropriated by exile Tibetans, and Suzuki Zen has been appropriated by Asian American Buddhists. Arguments against alleged “Westernization” (or cultural misunderstanding) can often be revealed as new invented creolized traditions (with Buddhist vocabulary and Western grammar) with alternative cultural appropriation and ideological statements wrapped in discourses of authenticity.<sup>30</sup>

When the “critical study of religion” becomes normative and re-essentialized neo- or self-orientalism<sup>31</sup> with exclusivistic authenticity rhetorics, a natural confirmation bias with identity fusion and safe space radicalism are probably more realistic outcomes (in the classroom or in the sangha) than a genuine understanding of (and respect for) diversity. It is a challenge to decipher the de-racialization program in a statement about white Buddhists and sympathizers’ “arrogant remarks [which] flow naturally from an ideology of white supremacy that has been operative in the lives of Europeans and Euro-Americans since the time of colonialism” (Cheah 2011: x) without getting connotations of previous race-based, essentialized ideologies. What Hugh Urban (2017: 12) calls “white male bashing” in the study of Indian religion and what Galen Amstutz in relation to Japanese American Buddhism describes as “ethno-chauvinism with transnational dimensions” (2014: 146) serve as purification of alleged “white contamination” in the same manner as previous colonizers and Christian missionaries strategically essentialized cultures and religions in hierarchic systems. When seeing identity politics — and the postglobal critique of the knowledge it entails — as political agendas with interests in re-essentializations, claims of authenticity appear in a new disguise. If it is true that “most of the discourse of cultural exploitation operates from a model of culture as clearly bounded and distinct, as singular and organic” (Rogers 2006: 478), all cultural and religious developments are potentially in the category of cultural appropriation, including all forms of transcultural Buddhism.<sup>32</sup> If understanding culture as hybrid, intersectional, and transcultural (478), it is obvious that “transculturation involves ongoing, circular appropriations of elements between multiple cultures, including elements that are themselves transcultural” (491).<sup>33</sup> This was also the case with the constructive networks of people in the making of

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<sup>30</sup> Using Buddhism for ideological agendas is exemplified in various revisionist Buddhist history writings to legitimate feminist, black, gender, or race positionings, thus mirroring other “Western” modernity projections such as individualization, secularization, commercialization, etc. For instance, positing “4 signs you’re culturally appropriating Buddhism” with one of the arguments against calling something “Zen” or using sacred objects as decoration since “Zen Buddhism advocates for a level of spirituality that can’t be accessed through material items or simple words” (Tran 2017) is probably more Protestant Buddhism than typically Japanese Zen Buddhism. The campaigning for taking yoga back to India and Hinduism forgets to mention that modern yoga (or what is today often understood as “authentic yoga”) also has Scandinavian roots.

<sup>31</sup> “Self-Orientalism refers to the appropriation of Orientalist discourse by ‘Orientals,’ causing ‘the Orient’ to shift from being a passive recipient of Orientalism to an active agent in its (re)production” (Woods 2018: 218).

<sup>32</sup> As Zen Buddhist practitioner Brad Warner rhetorically asks: “Is Japanese Buddhism cultural appropriation? Is Chinese Buddhism cultural appropriation? Are Tibetan Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, or Sri Lankan Buddhism cultural appropriation? Buddhism did not originate in any of these cultures” (B. Warner 2016).

<sup>33</sup> The question of who owns the right to be authentic sometimes takes interesting configurations. Israel’s 2018 Eurovision Song Contest winner Netta Barzilai was accused (by Westerners, not Japanese) of cultural appropriation of

modern Buddhism (Bocking *et al.* 2015), in circular spirituality (Borup and Fibiger 2017), and basically in all Buddhist and other religious configurations. Those religious groups with Asian origin that are *not* sufficiently open to negotiating the appropriation of Western culture (for instance by soft Protestantization) and to overcoming exclusive ethnicity have shown lower levels of survivability, as the case of Japanese American Buddhism seems to exemplify (Borup 2013).

### Where Should the Real Scholar of Religion Stand?

In discussing theoretical and methodological positions in the study of Buddhism, Cabezón and Davaney describe two ideal types of knowledge: at the one end of the spectrum the ideal of scientific knowledge as objective knowledge with the identity of the knower being irrelevant to the truth claims, and at the other end the view that knowledge is linked to particular identities and experiences emerging from identity (2004: 7). In reality, most often both positions are taken into account, especially if investigating lived religion where it is obvious that a hardcore objectivist stance is highly problematic, not least because “scholars are *not* clean slates with no histories, values, or experiences shaping their scholarly work” (13). The ideal types are parallel to the explanatory fields of emic and etic representations in the general study of religion with the inbuilt challenges of Christian/Western biases and generalized default values and its involvement in “the crime of the colonial civilizing activities” (Joy 2007: 201) and “present-day global economic enterprises of an unsavory nature” (218) on the one hand and particularizations on the other hand. The emic perspective is often the ideal epistemological tool of many postmodern anthropologists and Buddhist identity scholar-practitioners in search of a “healthy self-reflexive approach” (218) rather than (superficial) cross-cultural and religious comparison.

The typical non-confessional “European style” scholarship where also the scholar of Buddhism (according to one of the highly acknowledged representatives of the field) “needs to have some distance from his/her faith when writing and teaching about his/her subject, rather than being an advocate for the religion” (Reader 2008: 89) is thus mainly built on an “outsider’s perspective,” since “bringing one’s faith into the classroom and into one’s scholarship is a denial of the academic tradition and an insult to the ideal of impartiality upon which academic disciplines and enquiry rely” (108). For “insiders” and identity scholars it might seem unconvincing to see third-person etic representations adhere to explanatory

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Japanese culture as she was wearing a traditional kimono dress and had her hair in two buns, with *maneki-neko* waving cat figurines in the background. Similarly, an event with exhibitions and try-on sessions of kimonos was celebrated in Japan while being accused of cultural appropriation in America (Valk 2015: 386). The false consciousness of indigenous people seems legitimate to suggest if it serves the higher purpose of exposing “White Privilege Studies,” when for instance Tibetans accepting Orientalist stereotypes with their flattering depictions of Tibet is seen as a form of violence (Kleisath 2014: 149). If the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s annual application of criminalizing blasphemy (i.e., criticism of Islam) before the UN’s Human Rights Commission is seen as fundamentalist identity politics at play (rather than a case of the consequences of Islamophobia) and if some of the claims of getting yoga back to India/Hinduism are seen as right wing supremacist rhetorics — if seeing claims of infringement on behalf of others as performances of personal identity ideologies — new horizons of understanding appear in a different light.

models and generalized concepts claiming to “take religion seriously.” Models (of any colors) are important, but of course dynamic and changeable, and there is no need to adhere to the “false impression that the categories are static” (Spencer 2014: 36). While it might be true that “the Two Buddhism system in its current form is already becoming obsolete” (36) and therefore it “can no longer keep pace with newer generations of American Buddhists” (Han 2017: 8), it does not constitute a contradiction: models necessarily need re-articulation in accordance with historical development and theoretical refinement. That there is no direct correspondence between the lived experiences or semantic worlds of the subjects and the analytical categories of the observer is therefore not (necessarily) a scientific problem.<sup>34</sup> Automatically universalizing subjective experience is a problem, however, ignoring the high possibility of ideological bias, cultural inauthenticity, and psychological mischievousness. Equally problematic is the celebration of particularizations based on difference paradigms, making comparison and generalizations impossible.<sup>35</sup> Exposing social realities and inadequate scholarly models is naturally an appreciated endeavor. Postglobal intersectionality/identity politics is highly interesting to study as a phenomenon and to be critically inspired by, especially when entering the study of religion through a hermeneutic filter of severe suspicion.

### **Conclusion: Postglobalization and the Study of Religion**

Globalization of religion is characterized by processes of transcultural and transnational interactions with multiple flows of ideas, practices, and material culture. De-territorialization, de-ethnification, and “fusion of horizons” have created (ideals, narratives, and sometimes empirical realities of) centripetal forces constituting new global configurations of religion. Global Buddhism has in many ways been prototypical of such characteristics, based on historical preconditions. Inspired by and responding to colonial suppression and Orientalism, elite representations of Buddhist modernity in the late 19th and early 20th century focused on individualization, meditation, spirituality, rationality, and science as arguments in both nationalistic and universalistic discourses. The East–West creolized modern and Protestant Buddhism entered the West, accommodating, transforming, domesticating, and appropriating Asian Buddhism with a focus on universalistic (as opposed to “cultural”) Buddhism. Globalizing tendencies of transcultural flows made possible by (media) technology and migrations enhanced the

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<sup>34</sup> Even though it is relevant to criticize “religion” as a usable concept for pre-modern religion, today it has its own ontological relevance; as a legal and socio-economic concept it does make sense (also in a Japanese context, where Buddhist priests are described as self-identifying as “religious specialists,” *shūkyōka* [Horii 2018: 18]).

<sup>35</sup> “No particular religious, racial, gender, or other identity in and of itself should function as the trump card when evaluating the quality of scholarly work” (Cabezón and Davaney 2004: 20). It is “a fact that white professors write successful and important monographs on African-American working women; that African-American scholars write influential books on white philosophers; that straight women write convincingly and insightfully about gay men; that Catholics write seminal books on Buddhism; and that straight men teach successful courses in women’s studies” (Cabezón 2004: 48). Scholar of religion Aaron Hughes, in his critique of the study of Islam, warns against losing critical awareness and robustness by becoming “prisoners of Said” (a reference to Donald Lopez’ influential book *Prisoners of Shangri-La*) and overly invested in identity politics and the rhetorics of authenticity (Hughes 2015: 23, 37).

alignment between open markets and open hermeneutics, making democratization, de-ethnification, and de-culturalization the accessible practice and identity of authentic, global Buddhism. As described in this article, such prescribed narratives of global Buddhism in recent years (especially in North America) have been criticized for and construed as representations of rather particular (social and racial) kinds of religiosity (e.g., “white Buddhism”). It was suggested that such “postglobal Buddhism,” with its postmodern questioning of grand narratives and normative ideals of re-culturalization should be seen as an expression of and response to general societal and political tendencies. The focus on identity politics with its reclaiming of “territory” and criticism of “white-washed” cultural appropriation has entered the Buddhist world as a politically engaged, subjectivist, and group-oriented formation within a postglobal “difference paradigm” in which centrifugal forces are considered necessary to counterbalance inequality and misrepresentation. While the changing (but not necessarily irreversible) configurations of Western Buddhism seem to illustrate responses to postglobal tendencies and identity politics, it would be an obvious area for future investigation of also other religious traditions in a comparative perspective.

Does this have any impact on the study of religion? Of course. Apart from being a new trend “out there” to be studied as part of contemporary religion, it also forces the scholar to reconsider previous models of investigation. Just like anthropologists and post-Orientalist/postcolonialist scholars have previously helped deconstruct former “Western” textbook descriptions of Buddhism, the emic exposure of “global Buddhism” as a particular *kind* of Buddhism may inspire the scholar to reconsider further presumptions of what Buddhism (also) is; relativizing universals as particulars naturally places postglobal Buddhism as “yet another representation” in the complex, vibrant, and ever-changing landscape of what is pragmatically called Buddhism. It furthermore forces the scholar to reshape models such as the “Two Buddhisms” and ideas of Buddhism in the West, primarily being focused on individualized spirituality, meditation, and transcultural identity.

Do new emic transformations coupled with identity politics demand new methods and theories in academia? Obviously, it seems to have already had an impact at some (mainly American) universities. Insisting on enlightenment ideals, Western default religion models and hardcore objectivist stances within the study of religion might not transgress tendencies of scholarly compartmentalization. Power relations in understanding and representing religion are, of course, as relevant as ever both in sangha and in academia, as is the investigation of both cultural appropriation and cultural circulation. To remain robust, the general study of religion needs periodic challenges from also postmodern (including feminist, post-Orientalist, intersectionalist) scholarship, but need not succumb to requests of radical re-positionings of scholarly traditions and postmodern alignment with a postglobal religious world. The comparative study of religion is — just like religions themselves — always bound to be guilty of some kind of cultural appropriation. This could also, in a softer version, be categorized as various degrees of appreciation, which ought still to be a quite legitimate approach to what is also religiously disengaged scholarship.

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